In the following paragraphs I will be assessing the view that argues whether gender roles and relationships are becoming more equal.

Many sociologists agree with this point, amongst those being Wilmot and Young who conducted research over a 20 year time period. In the 1950’s they found that couples had segregated conjugal roles but in the 1970’s there was an amount of evidence that showed joint conjugal roles within a household, thus suggesting that the family was becoming more democratic and equal (the symmetrical family) in terms of the roles relating to genders. Another sociologist who shares this view with Wilmot and Young is Gershuny (1994) who found that wives who worked full time were more likely to do less housework; the less time they spent in the home meant that their husbands were gradually doing more leading to an equal division of domestic labour. This is backed up with evidence from Sullivan who studied past data and found that men were participating in typical ‘housewife’ chores in present society compared to that from 1975. The research that these three sociologists carried out all suggest a ‘march of progress’ in that roles are becoming more equal over time.

However some sociologists disagree with the idea which states gender roles are becoming more equal; Ann Oakley believed that Young and Wilmot’s work was flawed as it only asked if husbands helped their wives with housework once a week. She did not believe that this defined equality and when she carried out her own research she found that only 15% of husbands participated in housework and 25% in childcare showing that housework and household roles were still very much female dominated. This is backed up with evidence from Ferri and Smith who defined the dual burden which is the idea that women do both paid work and the housework. They found that full time employment had little impact on the domestic division of labour and if anything employment was only increasing the amount of work women participated as a result of men still seeing housework as a women’s role and avoiding it.

Overall I feel that gender roles and relationships are becoming more equal but at a gradual rate. Despite research from Ann Oakley and Ferri and Smith showing that men play a limited role in the household, there research does still prove that a minority of men do help their wives. I believe that this increase in men’s role in the home will continue to rise over time due to the changing of values, (which Gershuny stated) a result of women having more power in the home forcing gender roles and relationships to become more democratic.